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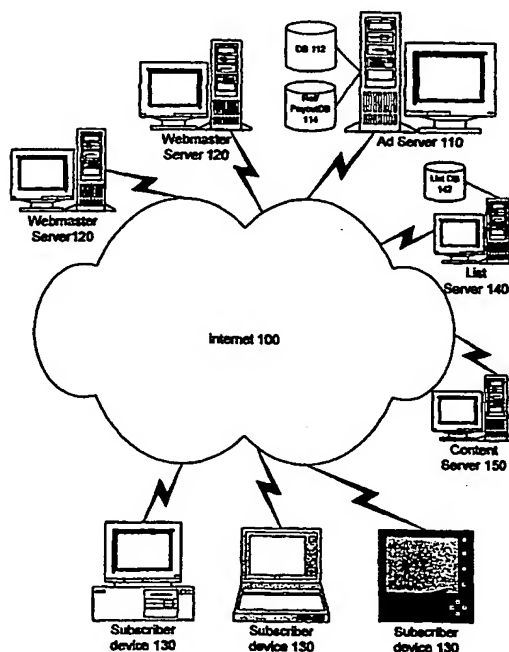
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR AN E-MAIL AFFILIATE PROGRAM



(57) Abstract: The present invention makes it easy to collect, manage, and communicate with consumers using e-mail and other forms of push-based messaging as the primary vehicle for communication of marketing content. The software makes it simple to offer bounties or other types of compensation to any participant interested in referring new users to into the system as well as offer a multiple tier referral system so that those participants can refer others as well. The present invention makes it possible to track the entire path of a communication and all of the actions inside of it for modeling and other analytical purposes; simplifies the process for generating custom marketing communications, in large capacity; simplifies the process of enabling the selection, insertion and delivery of marketing communications inside of the main communication layer and enables an administrator to easily administer all aspects of the software from an intuitive web based interface.

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Title: Method and Apparatus for an E-mail Affiliate Program**1 FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

2 This invention is drawn to an e-mail affiliate program and process for marketing
3 purposes. It includes software for the implementation of a system to produce e-mail
4 marketing lists. A preferred embodiment for these lists is to supply subscribers for Internet
5 publications commonly known as "ezines".
6

7 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

8 In recent years, the exponential growth of the network of computer networks known
9 as the Internet has also lead to enormous growth in the area of "on-line" advertising. One
10 popular channel of on-line advertising has been e-mail.

11 Typically, entities have collected e-mail addresses from various sources, such as by
12 manually collecting or using spiders or bots to collect e-mail addresses from news groups or
13 auction sites on the Internet. They then broadcast or "spam" an identical, unsolicited
14 marketing message to their collected list. Needless to say, these unsolicited messages annoy
15 most recipients and result in very low response rates. Additionally, many recipients regard
16 the "spam" as an invasion of their privacy. What is needed is a system that sends marketing
17 messages only to those who "opt-in" and increases both the number of participants and/or the
18 number of responses by offering incentives.
19
20
21

22 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

23 The present invention is drawn to software that allows an enterprise to offer cash,
24 prizes, or incentives to webmasters or consumers in exchange for their assistance in (i)
25 accumulating subscribers or e-mail addresses and/or (ii) getting subscribers to view
26 advertisements or to refer associates to the program.

27 The subscribers (typically subscribed via their e-mail address) may subscribe for
28 content-based subscriptions/newsletters/alerts, marketing message only-based
29 subscriptions/mailings, and incentive-based subscriptions where the subscriber may receive
30 incentives, such as payment in cash, program points toward prizes, discounts on products or

1 opportunities to win sweepstakes, in exchange for responding to future e-mails and other
2 marketing messages or content delivered through internet-enabled channels.

3 The present invention includes:

- 4 a) a sign-up means that allows webmasters or consumers to enter their information,
5 including e-mail address, and the right to market to it, online through a web
6 browser so that they can participate into the program;
- 7 b) a set of instructions and computer coding into which the webmaster or participant
8 must use as a method of which to promote the program , including prompting the
9 user for an action, like entering information or clicking somewhere, before they
10 are eligible;
- 11 c) a statistical interface which provides the webmaster or participant with a way to
12 see how many subscribers and/or referrals they have generated and or what
13 revenue/prizes/incentives they have accumulated to date (either instantly directly
14 after the transaction, or at any time as a cumulative sum of all chance possibilities
15 that have occurred in the past); and
- 16 d) a software application which allows an administrator of the program to
 - 17 1) view accounts of participants,
 - 18 2) view number of participants,
 - 19 3) edit information on participants,
 - 20 4) keep track of subscriber and webmaster referral information, and
 - 21 5) send e-mails to the subscribers and/or the participants.

22 The software allows a consumer to sign-up to subscribe for delivery of information or
23 content such as ezines, newsletters, alerts or marketing messages with each such delivery to
24 be sent to the subscriber's e-mail address. Consumers may subscribe for more than one
25 offering (i.e., co-registration).

26 The e-mail delivery system of the present invention includes a system that consists of
27 software and hardware allowing the owner of a mailing list the ability to e-mail out marketing
28 messages to their subscribers and enable them to track the responses of those messages.

29 Tracking of responses includes:

- 30 a) whether the subscriber received the e-mail, opened the e-mail, read the e-mail,
31 how long they read the e-mail, did they perform any action inside of the e-mail
32 such as fill in information, click on a hyperlink;

- 1 b) the geographic location of the subscriber(s), area code, domain name, ISP, sex,
2 marital status, occupation, etc... this reporting can be in the form of individually
3 reported data or group reported data;
- 4 c) the ability to track subscribers over time in regards to all of the e-mails they have
5 received, the ads they have received, the ads they have responded to,
6 characteristics about that subscriber, including, but not limited to, observed
7 behavior, demographic and psychographic data that is available on the subscriber;
- 8 d) the ability to track on a timeline when any of the actions, such as opening,
9 clicking, etc., occurred for the population sample mailed to; and
- 10 e) the ability to send different messages to sample groups with the same info,
11 decision which message is most effective, and send more of the better-performing
12 message to the rest of the population with the same or similar
13 demographics/details.

14 It is an object of the present invention to provide software that allows an enterprise to
15 offer cash, prizes, or incentives to webmasters or consumers in exchange for their assistance
16 in (i) accumulating subscribers or e-mail addresses and/or (ii) getting subscribers to view
17 advertisements or to refer associates to the program.

18 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to reliably deliver marketing
19 messages to millions of recipients on a periodic or demand basis.

20 It is a further object of the invention to store e-mail marketing information directly in
21 a database instead of flat files or other file formats.

22 It is another object of the invention to import existing participant e-mail marketing
23 information from flat files or other file formats into a new database.

24 It is another object of the invention to keep e-mail marketing statistics about each e-
25 mail subscriber, including: lists subscribed (including start and end date), total number of e-
26 mails sent to this subscriber, which ads e-mailed to this subscriber, and which ads clicked by
27 this subscriber.

28 It is yet another object of the invention to keep statistics about each referring
29 participant in an e-mail marketing program, including the number of subscribers referred and
30 the referring (multi-level) participant.

31 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability for e-mail marketing list creator
32 to submit each issue's content via a web interface.

1 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability for e-mail marketing recipients to
2 subscribe or unsubscribe to one or more lists via e-mail via an internet, with web-based
3 confirmation.

4 It is another object of the invention to provide the ability to launch list distribution for
5 e-mail marketing via a web-based interface for one or more mailing lists, allowing
6 administrators to specify a time to automatically launch the distribution.

7 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability for participants to sign-up for an
8 e-mail marketing program via a web-based interface, and indicate a referring webmaster or
9 subscriber.

10 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability for participants in an e-mail
11 marketing program to check their statistics via a web-based interface.

12 It is another object of the invention to allow subscribers to modify their sign-up
13 profile, including the list of information or content they want to receive.

14 It is another object of the invention to provide the ability to monitor the performance
15 of the content delivery in an e-mail marketing system, including status of particular content
16 (current status, % of content delivered, time started/stopped, etc), system throughput (number
17 of recipients per each piece of content delivered, per day, bounced e-mails, etc.),
18 subscription/unsubscription per day per particular content, and bandwidth usage.

19 It is another object of the invention to remove bogus/undeliverable addresses in an e-
20 mail marketing system.

21 It is another object of the invention to provide an e-mail marketing program with real-
22 time or batch subscribe and delete facilities via a web or an e-mail interface.

23 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to show ads on "public" web
24 interfaces to the content delivery system in an e-mail marketing program (i.e., when
25 subscribers confirm their subscription, show an ad on that page).

26 It is an object of the invention to provide documentation on how each component of
27 an e-mail marketing system works.

28 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to test an e-mail marketing
29 system.

30 It is an object of the invention to provide a web or an e-mail interface to allow e-mail
31 marketing subscribers to retrieve ezine back issues with new ads.

32 It is an object of the invention to provide personalized content and ads for individual

1 recipients, specifically selecting content based upon attributes in a subscriber database (e.g.,
2 gender, age, chosen topics, etc.).

3 It is an object of the invention to provide an HTML sniffer to determine if a given e-
4 mail marketing subscriber can receive HTML e-mail.

5 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to add/edit/modify ads stored in a
6 database via web interface.

7 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to detect fraud in an e-mail
8 marketing program.

9 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to monitor e-mail marketing
10 system CPU/memory/disk/throughput usage on an hourly/daily/monthly or other assessment
11 period basis.

12 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to gather info about qmail usage
13 via qmailanalog package.

14 It is an object of the invention to integrate ad responses in an e-mail marketing system
15 with an advertising server, including the ability to track which ads a subscriber responded to.

16 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to send cookies to subscribers
17 when they confirm their subscription to an e-mail marketing program and link these up with
18 advertiser server cookies.

19 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability to construct new (temporary)
20 "sub-lists" from any set of e-mail marketing subscribers in the database via a web interface.

21 It is an object of the invention to provide the ability for content creators to
22 automatically include ads in an issue without manually inserting lengthy code.

23 It is an object of the invention to keep e-mail marketing statistics about each ad e-
24 mailed, including total times each ad e-mailed, how many times each ad e-mailed per ezine,
25 total times each ad responded to, and total unique responses for each ad.

26

27 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

28 **Figure 1** illustrates a basic network architecture for practicing the present invention.

29 **Figure 2** illustrates a basic flow diagram for practicing the present invention.

30

31 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

32 As used herein, the term "webmaster" refers to any entity, including an individual or

1 publisher, who uses a website to deliver or generate new subscribers to a product or service.
 2 A "participant" refers to any user of the present invention, including a webmaster or a
 3 subscriber.

4 The term "click(s)" refers to any measurable response from a consumer, including,
 5 but not limited to, selection by a mouse, rollerball, pointer, stylus, jog-dial, or any other user-
 6 selection device, and/or conversions or sales resulting therefrom. The term "internet" refers
 7 to any network of networks, whether wired or wireless, including WANs and global networks
 8 such as the ARPAnet-derived network commonly referred to as the Internet and the high-
 9 bandwidth Internet2.

10 The terms "ad(s)" and "advertisement(s)" refer to any creative or content produced, at
 11 least in part, for advertising purposes such as branding or the promotion of products or
 12 services. The term "e-mail" refers to any messaging to a specific entity over an internet to an
 13 internet-enabled device, including, but not limited to, both ordinary SMTP-based POP3 and
 14 IMAP e-mail, instant messaging (IM), and short messaging service (SMS). The term "e-mail
 15 address" refers to any identifier of a participant that allows for delivery of messages and/or
 16 content to the participant's internet-enabled device, including, but not limited to, standard
 17 "name@domain.tld" e-mail addresses, IP addresses, and phone numbers.

18 The following is a rough schema of the tables required by an ezine database of the
 19 preferred embodiment. Although described below with reference to an ezine, the system is
 20 equally suited for delivery of any information or content requested by subscribers to any
 21 internet-enabled device, including, but not limited to, newsletters, marketing messages, alerts
 22 and other subscriber requested content.

23 The "basic" tables describe individual entities in the ezine system: users (subscribers
 24 and webmasters), ads, and the different ezines themselves. These tables do not rely on
 25 information from other tables, and so have unique primary (i.e., not composite) keys.

26

27 *Confirmation Table*

28 Each row of this table describes one subscriber's confirmation information. Each row
 29 need only persist until a subscriber has confirmed their subscription, and can then be deleted.

30 Columns:

- 31 • email (primary key) // required, varchar(80),
- 32 references email field in user table

- 1 • ezine_code_list // required, varchar(60), space-
- 2 delimited list of ezines initially signed up for,
- 3 ignored once they have confirmed their signup - look in
- 4 ezine_subscriber table instead.
- 5 • referring_account_number // required, varchar(80),
- 6 references account_number in webmaster table for
- 7 initial signup (before confirmation). Ignored after
- 8 subscriber confirms - look in ezine_subscriber table
- 9 instead.

10

11 *User Table*

12 Each row of this table describes information common to any participant (either
13 subscriber or webmaster)

14 Columns:

15 Info for all participants (webmasters or subscribers)

- 16 • email (primary key) // required, varchar(80)
- 17 • first_name // required, varchar(30)
- 18 • last_name // required, varchar(30)
- 19 • zip_code // required, char(10)
- 20 • country // required, varchar(30), range is list of
- 21 provided countries
- 22 • signup_datetime // required, datetime, this is the
- 23 time when the subscriber is mailed their initial signup
- 24 letter
- 25 • IP_address // required, char(15)
- 26 • is_valid_email // required -- is this a valid email
- 27 address, char(1), Y|N
- 28 • admin_comments // optional, text, any comments that we
- 29 want to add about this user. This is not information
- 30 the user provides.
- 31 • is_active // optional, char(1), Y|N is this user

```
1      "active," i.e., can they receive ezines and be paid
2      • last_modified_timestamp // timestamp, not null
3      • num_bounced_deliveries // int, number of delivery
4      attempts to this user which have bounced
```

6 *Subscriber Table*

7 Each row of this table describes one subscriber.

8 Columns:

- ```

9 • email (foreign key) // required, varchar(80),
10 references email field in user table
11 • confirmation_string // required for S, char(64),
12 md5(email)+ datetime + process ID
13 • cookie_info // required for S, varchar(100)
14 • is_HTML_reader // required, char(1), Y|N -- can this
15 subscriber receive HTML-ified ezines

```

17 All these are optional info. for subscribers. Different ones will be displayed to different  
18 subscribers when they sign up, based on the referring webmaster.

- ```

19      • gender // char(6), Male or Female
20      • age // char(10), ranges: <13,13-17,18-21,22-24,25-
21        29,30-35,36-40,41-49,50-59,60-65,65+
22      • education_level // varchar(40), ranges: "some high
23        school," "high school graduate," "some college,"
24        "vocational/technical training," "college graduate,"
25        "graduate school," "doctorate"
26      • marital_status // char(7), range is married|single
27      • num_children // char(2), range is 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5+
28      • occupation // varchar(40), range: "professional,"
29        "administrative/clerical," "management,"
30        "designer/artist," "Internet professional," "educator,"
31        "marketing/sales," "engineer," "writer," "homemaker,"

```

1 "military service," "consultant," "legal field,"
2 "student," "retired," "other"
3 • income // varchar(10), range: <25K, 25-49K, 50-74K, 75-
4 99K, 100-149K, 150-199K, 200K+
5 • primary_computer_use // char(40), range is "home,"
6 "business," "home office," "school," "government
7 facility"
8 • interests // text, range is a comma-delimited list of
9 items that appear as checkboxes on the signup page:
10 sports, travel, entertainment/humor, dining,
11 investments, gaming, computing, autos, men's issues,
12 women's issues, health issues, trivia, astrology
13 • items_purchased // varchar(255), any items the
14 subscriber has purchased on the net
15 • like_to_purchase // varchar(255), any items the
16 subscriber would like to purchase on the net
17 • plan_to_purchase // varchar(40), any items the
18 subscriber is planning to purchase in the next year,
19 range: "vehicle," "boat," "house," "computer
20 equipment," "vacation package," "stereo equipment,"
21 "VCR"
22 • net_access_frequency // varchar(40), "every day," "once
23 or twice a week," "two or three times a month," "once a
24 month or less"
25 • wants_to_receive_email // char(1), Y|N -- does this
26 subscriber want to receive email about items of
27 interest
28 • last_modified_timestamp // timestamp, not null
29 • email_md5 // varchar(64), not null, this is the md5
30 hash value of the email address
31

1 *Webmaster Table*

2 Each row of this table describes one webmaster.

3 Columns:

- 4 • email (foreign key) // required, varchar(80), references
- 5 email field in user table
- 6 • account_name // required, varchar(25), must be >= 6 chars
- 7 • account_number (primary key, auto_increment) // required,
- 8 integer
- 9 • password // required, varchar(25), must be >= 6 chars
- 10 • address_line_1 // required, varchar(30)
- 11 • address_line_2 // optional, varchar(30)
- 12 • city // required, varchar(25)
- 13 • state // required, char(2), range is a list of state
- 14 abbreviations, or N/A to indicate outside the US
- 15 • phone_number // required, varchar(20)
- 16 • payee_on_check // required, varchar(50)
- 17 • minimum_check_value // required, decimal(7,2)
- 18 • tax_ID_or_SSN // required, varchar(20)
- 19 • referral_rate // required -- for user referrals,
- 20 decimal(4,2), default ".10"
- 21 • second_tier_rate // required -- for second-tier
- 22 referrals, decimal(4,2), default ".04"
- 23 • referring_account_number // optional, varchar(80), the
- 24 user who referred this one, references account_number
- 25 field in webmaster table
- 26 • referring_URL // optional, varchar(80), website through
- 27 which this webmaster was referred
- 28 • last_modified_timestamp // timestamp, not null

29

30 *Sign-up Field Table*

31 Each row of this table describes one possible field of data we want to collect for users.

1 Columns:

- 2 • field_name (primary key) // required, varchar(30), should
- 3 exactly match one of the optional subscriber fields in
- 4 the user table
- 5 • display_name //required - what the user sees on the web
- 6 page, varchar(255)
- 7 • data_type // required, varchar(12), range is INT, STRING,
- 8 DATE, etc.
- 9 • HTML_input_type // required -- type of control to show
- 10 for this field on web page, varchar(12), range is
- 11 checkbox, textfield, text, radio button, etc.
- 12 • value_range // optional, text, comma-delimited range if
- 13 provided, else free-form text if not provided

14

15 *Ezine Description Table*

16 Each row of this table describes one ezine.

17 Columns:

- 18 • ezine_code (primary key) // required, char(2), two-
- 19 character ezine code
- 20 • ezine_name // required, varchar(30), ezine
- 21 name
- 22 • ezine_URL // required, varchar(80), ezine
- 23 location
- 24 • short_description // required, varchar(80),
- 25 description in a few words
- 26 • long_description // required, varchar(255),
- 27 several sentence description
- 28 • thank_you_text // required, varchar(255), for
- 29 signup
- 30 • is_active // required, char(1), Y|N --
- 31 is this an active ezine

1 • creation_datetime // datetime, when this ezine was
2 created

3

4 *Ad Table*

5 Each row of this table describes one ad that can be inserted into an ezine issue

6 Columns:

- 7 • banner_id (primary key) // required, varchar(30)
8 • banner_text // required, TEXT
9 • banner_URL // required, varchar(80)
10 • num_clicks // required, BIGINT DEFAULT 0
11 • num_impressions // required, BIGINT DEFAULT 0
12 • is_active // required, char(1)
13 • entry_datetime // required, datetime

14

15 *Advertiser Table*

16 Each row of this table describes one advertiser

17 Columns:

- 18 • system_account (primary key) // varchar (50) not null
19 • advertiser_name (unique) // varchar (50), not null

20

21 *Ad Campaign Table*

22 Each row of this table describes one advertiser campaign

23 Columns:

- 24 • campaign_id (primary key) // varchar(30) not null
25 • system_account (unique) // varchar (50) not null,
26 references system_account in advertiser table
27 • banner_id // varchar(30) not null, references banner_id
28 in ads table
29 • num_clicks // bigint default 0
30 • num_impressions // bigint default 0
31 • start_datetime // datetime

- 1 • end_datetime // datetime
- 2 • comments // text
- 3 • gross_payment // decimal(5,2)
- 4 • percent_done // int(3)
- 5 • target_percent // int(3)
- 6 • unit_difference // bigint
- 7 • effective_CPM // bigint

8

9 The following tables are derived from information in the basic tables above. They
 10 also contain some information unique to themselves. Note that these tables could have
 11 duplicate ID keys, but will have unique composite keys.

12

13 *Website Table*

14 Each row of this table describes a webmaster and a website (since a webmaster might
 15 own several different sites).

16 Columns:

- 17 • site_URL (primary key) //required, varchar(80)
- 18 • site_name // required, varchar(80)
- 19 • site_description // required, varchar(255)
- 20 • account_number (foreign key) // required, varchar(80),
 21 references account_number field in webmaster table

22

23 *Website Sign-up Field Table*

24 Each row of this table describes a sign-up field to be displayed to new subscribers
 25 when they are referred by the specified website.

26 Columns:

- 27 • site_URL (foreign key) // required, varchar(80),
 28 references site_URL field in website table
- 29 • field_name (foreign key) // required, varchar(30),
 30 references field_name in signup field table
- 31 • is_required // required -- is this subscriber required to

1 fill in this field when they signup from this site,
2 char(1), Y|N
3

4 *Website Hosted Ezines Table*

5 Each row of this table describes one ezine that can be hosted by a given website when
6 the website is being used by a webmaster to generate subscriptions.

7 Columns:

- 8 • ezine_code (foreign key) // required, char(2), references
9 ezine_code in ezine table;
- 10 • site_URL (foreign key) // required, varchar(80),
11 references site_URL in signup field table
12

13 *User Payout Table*

14 Each row is the payout for a given participant on a given date if the participant is to be
15 paid for the subscription.

16 Columns:

- 17 • account_number (foreign_key) // required, varchar(80),
18 references account_number in webmaster table
- 19 • amount_paid // decimal(14,5), not null
- 20 • date_paid // required, date, when paid
21

22 *Ezine Subscribers Table*

23 Each row of this table describes one subscriber to a given ezine

24 Columns:

- 25 • email (foreign key) // required, varchar(80), references
26 email in user table
- 27 • ezine_code (foreign key) // required, char(2),
28 references ezine_code in ezine table
- 29 • signup_datetime // required, datetime, when user signed
30 up to receive this ezine
- 31 • last_modified_timestamp // timestamp, this is the last

- 1 time that the user modified their subscription to this
 2 ezine. Initially this is the same as signup_datetime.
 3 • is_active // required, char(1), Y|N-- is active
 4 recipient of this ezine
 5 • referring_account_number // optional -- the first (and
 6 only) user who referred this subscriber to this ezine,
 7 varchar(80), references account_number key in webmaster
 8 table
 9 • referring_URL // optional, varchar(80), the website
 10 through which the user subscribed to the ezine

11

12 *Ezine Issue Table*

13 Each row of this table describes one mailing or issue of any ezine

14 Columns:

- 15 • issue_id (primary key) // required, varchar(30)
 16 • ezine_code (foreign_key) // required, char(2), references
 17 ezine_code in ezine table
 18 • last_modified_timestamp // required, timestamp
 19 • req_start_datetime // datetime, when delivery of this
 20 issue was requested to begin
 21 • actual_start_datetime // datetime, when delivery of this
 22 issue actually began
 23 • end_queue_datetime // datetime, when this issue was fully
 24 queued
 25 • end_delivery_datetime // datetime, when issue's delivery
 26 completed
 27 • status // required, char (1), status of this issue's
 28 delivery D|S|P|I (disabled, sent, pending, in progress)
 29 • num_recipients // bigint, not null

30

31 *Ezine Ad Stats Table*

Each row of this table describes one ad's impression and click statistics for a given ezine or individual mailing of an ezine.

3 Columns:

- ```

4 • banner_id (foreign key) // required, varchar(30),
5 references banner_id in ad table
6 • num_clicks // required, bigint, how many times this
7 ad has been clicked from this ezine
8 • position_in_ezine // required, int(3), position of ad in
9 ezine
10 • issue_id (foreign_key) // required, varchar(30)
11 references issue_id in ezine_issue table

```

13 *Subscriber Click Stats Table*

14 Each row of this table describes one ad that a subscriber has clicked on

15 Columns:

- ```
16 • email_md5 (foreign_key) // required, varchar(64),
17   references email_md5 in subscriber table
18 • banner_id (foreign_key) // required, varchar(30),
19   references banner_id in ad table
20 • issue_id (foreign_key) // required, varchar(30),
21   references issue_id in ezine_issue table
```

23 The following tables are for ezines administration purposes

25 *Admin User table*

26 Columns:

- ```

27 • username varchar(80) not null
28 • password varchar(30) not null
29 • first_name varchar(30) not null
30 • last_name varchar(30) not null
31 • signup_datetime datetime not null

```

- 1 • IP\_address varchar(15) not null
- 2 • ezine char(1) not null
- 3 • user char(1) not null
- 4 • internal char(1) not null
- 5 • stats char(1) not null
- 6 • content char(1) not null

7

8 *Admin Login Log Table*

9 Columns:

- 10 • username varchar(80) not null
- 11 • entry\_datetime datetime not null
- 12 • IP\_address varchar(15) not null

13

14 *Admin Error Log Table*

15 Columns:

- 16 • username varchar(80) not null
- 17 • entry\_datetime datetime not null
- 18 • IP\_address varchar(15) not null
- 19 • error\_msg varchar(50) not null

20

21 *Admin Activity Log Table*

22 Columns:

- 23 • username varchar(80) not null
- 24 • entry\_datetime datetime not null
- 25 • IP\_address varchar(15) not null
- 26 • function varchar(30) not null

27

28 The software of the invention also provides various web interface tools for the ezine  
29 system, including those used by ezine administrators, webmasters, subscribers, including:

- 30 • Ezine Content Creation

1 This allows a list creator/moderator to submit content for a list.

2 • Distribution Administration

3 Allows ezine administrator to indicate start time for distribution of one or more  
4 ezines. Also allows administrator to cancel one or more distributions in progress.

5 Administrator should be able to add or remove subscribers or webmasters, as needed.

6 • Stats Viewer

7 Allows ad server personnel to view/extract database stats about ads, lists, webmasters,  
8 individual ezines, or subscribers.

9 • Subscriber Sign-up

10 Allows subscribers to sign up for one or more ezines or other information they want.

11 At this point, the user enters their e-mail address and selects the ezines or other  
12 information they want. A confirmation number is e-mailed to them, which they must  
13 use to confirm their sign-up. If possible, a cookie is put on their device at this point.

14 • Subscriber Confirmation

15 This is where the user confirms their sign-up for the selected ezines. They are  
16 optionally required to fill out a survey. Once completed, they are added to the  
17 mailing list for the desired ezines or other information.

18 • Subscriber Ezine Change

19 Allows subscribers to sign-up for new ezines or cancel subscription to ezines they're  
20 already receiving.

21 • Webmaster Sign-up

22 Allows webmasters to sign up, and indicate a referring (second-tier) webmaster. The  
23 webmaster is required to fill out a survey of information.

24 • Webmaster Stats/Admin

25 Allows webmasters to view the stats for the number of subscribers and webmasters  
26 they've referred to the program (and the payout they'll receive). They can also  
27 change their account info and get the required HTML code to place on their webpages  
28 or get other information needed to refer subscribers.

29 • Conversion utility

30 Imports existing flat files into a database (i.e., MySQL or Oracle). These are a series  
31 of perl or other language scripts that process the various flat files, and write a handful  
32 of new flat files which contain the combined data. These new flat files can then be

1 imported into the database via the LOAD or other command.

2 • Bounce remover

3 Removes undeliverable addresses from the database. To facilitate this, the present  
4 invention adds its own header to each e-mail sent: X-Sent-To: address@domain.com.

5

6 An example of the webmaster coding which can be provided as part of this invention  
7 is disclosed in the following JavaScript:

8

```
9 <script language="javascript">
10 function thankyou_ne() {
11 var w =
12 window.open("", "thankyou", "scrollbars=yes, resizable=no, toolbar
13 =no, directories=no, status=no, menubar=no, location=no, screnX=200
14 , screenY=200, width=640, height=500");
15 return true;
16 }
17 </script>
```

18

19 This is how the <form> tag is defined:

```
20 <form target="thankyou"
21 action="http://webserver1.teknosurf.com/cgi-bin/subscribe.cgi"
22 method="post" onsubmit="return (
23 (this.email.value.indexOf("@")>0 &&
24 this.email.value.indexOf(".")>0) ? thankyou_ne()
25 : (alert("Please enter a valid email address.")) ||
26 false))">
```

27

28 The following line is added to the form:

```
29 <input type="hidden" name="code_num" value="1">
```

30

31 In operating the present invention, it is preferable to use a webmaster's  
32 account\_number instead of account\_name in referring\_account field. This requires changes

1 to the import script. Also, if user logs in via account\_name, the system can get the  
2 corresponding number and pass that along to the webmaster-\*.cgi scripts.

3 **Figure 1** illustrates a basic network architecture for practicing the present invention,  
4 wherein an ad server 110 supplies the needed software to webmaster servers 120 and  
5 subscriber devices 130, either directly or indirectly (i.e., via another webmaster server or  
6 subscriber device which already has downloaded the software) over internet 100.

7 In a preferred embodiment, the ad server 110 provides both an ad server database 112  
8 and a referral/payout database 114. The system also can include a separate list server 140,  
9 that maintains its own subscriber list database 142, and a separate content server 150.

10 **Figure 2** illustrates a basic flow diagram for practicing the present invention. An  
11 initial step 200 in the process is for webmasters to sign-up and download the software needed  
12 to practice the invention from an enabling entity such as an ad server. This sign-up can be  
13 done in any suitable manner, but is preferably accomplished through use of a web-based sign-  
14 up form or page, wherein the webmaster provides the input required for the user table and the  
15 webmaster table, as described above. This input can also include any referring webmaster  
16 information.

17 Consumers, likewise at 220, sign-up and download the software they need to practice  
18 the invention from an enabling entity such as an ad server or webmaster server. Again, this  
19 sign-up can be done in any suitable manner, but is preferably accomplished through use of a  
20 web-based sign-up form or page, wherein the consumer provides the input required for the  
21 confirmation table, user table, and subscriber table, as described above. This input can also  
22 include any referring webmaster or referring subscriber information.

23 As participants, the webmasters and subscribers have the necessary software/code to  
24 refer, at 230, other webmasters and subscribers and this information is tracked by the ad  
25 server, at 250.

26 The information or content that the subscriber has opted-in to receive is e-mailed to  
27 the subscriber at 240, and the subscriber responses are tracked at 250.

28 The information collected is then used for purposes such as to calculate incentives and  
29 payouts for the program participants, at 260. Additionally, the ad server can analyze the  
30 collected information by categories/fields, including but not limited to, website, ezine, ad  
31 campaign, ad, ad position, subscriber (including demographics, etc.), time, etc. to improve the  
32 effectiveness of the marketing response.

1           As disclosed above, the present invention makes it easy to collect, manage, and  
2   communicate with consumers using e-mail and other forms of push-based messaging as the  
3   primary vehicle for communication of marketing content. The present system makes it  
4   simple to offer bounties or other types of compensation to any participant interested in  
5   referring new users into the system as well as offer a multiple tier referral system so that  
6   those participants can refer others as well. The present invention makes it possible to track  
7   the entire path of a communication and all of the actions inside of it for modeling, reporting,  
8   auditing and other analytical purposes. The system also simplifies the process for generating  
9   custom marketing communications in large capacity. The present invention simplifies the  
10   process of enabling the selection, insertion and delivery of marketing communications inside  
11   of the main communication layer and enables an administrator to easily administer all aspects  
12   of the software from an intuitive web based interface. As disclosed, it enables the systems to  
13   run self-sufficient and be monitored for maximum performance. The present invention also  
14   enables the entire system to be scaleable.  
15

- 1 I Claim:
- 2 1. A method for e-mail-based opt-in marketing, comprising:
- 3 providing an ad server connected to an internet;
- 4 providing a database connected to said ad server;
- 5 having at least one webmaster server connected to said internet;
- 6 having at least one internet-enabled subscriber device connected to said internet;
- 7 providing software instructions on each said webmaster server for collecting an e-mail
- 8 address for said subscriber device and storing said e-mail address on said database by having
- 9 an operator of said subscriber device input said e-mail address and make a selection to opt-in
- 10 for delivery of information and/or content to said e-mail address; and
- 11 providing software instructions on said ad server to facilitate delivery of said
- 12 information and/or content to said subscriber device, wherein said information and/or content
- 13 includes an ad.
- 14 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing an incentive to said subscriber.
- 15 3. The method of claim 2, wherein said incentive is for responding to said ad and is
- 16 selected from the group consisting of redeemable program points, prizes, discounts on goods
- 17 or services, sweepstakes entries, currency, and goods or services.
- 18 4. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing compensation to said webmaster
- 19 or said subscriber for referrals.
- 20 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing compensation to said webmaster
- 21 or said subscriber for subscriber responses to ads in said information and/or content.
- 22 6. The method of claim 1, wherein said information and/or content is selected from the
- 23 group consisting of ezines, newsletters, alerts and marketing messages.
- 24 7. A system for e-mail-based opt-in marketing, comprising:
- 25 an ad server connected to an internet;
- 26 a database connected to said ad server;
- 27 at least one webmaster server connected to said internet;
- 28 at least one internet-enabled subscriber device connected to said internet;
- 29 software instructions on each said webmaster server for collecting an e-mail address
- 30 for said subscriber device and storing said e-mail address on said database by having an
- 31 operator of said subscriber device input said e-mail address and make a selection to opt-in for
- 32 delivery of information and/or content to said e-mail address; and



1 software instructions on said ad server to facilitate delivery of said information and/or  
2 content to said subscriber device, wherein said information and/or content includes an ad.

3 8. The system of claim 7, further comprising means to provide an incentive to said  
4 subscriber for opting-in.

5 9. The system of claim 8, wherein said incentive is selected from the group consisting of  
6 redeemable program points, prizes, discounts on goods or services, sweepstakes entries,  
7 currency, and goods or services.

8 10. The system of claim 7, further comprising means for providing compensation to said  
9 webmaster or said subscriber for referrals.

10 11. The system of claim 7, further comprising means for providing compensation to said  
11 webmaster or said subscriber for subscriber responses to ads in said information and/or  
12 content.

13 12. The system of claim 7, wherein said information and/or content is selected from the  
14 group consisting of ezines, newsletters, and marketing messages.

15 13. A method for encouraging consumers to participate in an e-mail marketing program,  
16 comprising:

17 providing means for said consumer to opt-in to subscribe to receive ad-containing  
18 information and/or content at their e-mail address from said e-mail marketing program;

19 providing software to said consumer to allow said consumer to refer other consumers  
20 to said e-mail marketing program as referrals;

21 providing compensation to said consumer for any referrals; and

22 providing incentives to said consumer for responding to ads in said information and/or  
23 content.

24 14. The method of claim 13, wherein said compensation is selected from the group  
25 consisting of currency, goods or services, discounts on goods or services, redeemable  
26 program points and prizes.

27 15. The method of claim 13, wherein said incentives are selected from the group  
28 consisting of sweepstakes entries, currency, goods or services, discounts on goods or  
29 services, redeemable program points and prizes.

30 16. The method of claim 13, wherein said information and/or content is selected from the  
31 group consisting of ezines, newsletters, and marketing messages.

32 17. A method for encouraging webmasters to participate in an e-mail marketing program,

1 comprising:  
2 providing software to said webmaster to allow said webmaster to subscribe consumers  
3 to receive ad-containing information and/or content at their e-mail address from said e-mail  
4 marketing program;  
5 providing software to said webmaster to allow said webmaster to refer other  
6 webmasters to said e-mail marketing program as referrals;  
7 providing compensation to said webmaster for any referrals; and  
8 providing compensation to said webmaster for subscribing consumers to said e-mail  
9 marketing program.

10 18. The method of claim 17, wherein said compensation is selected from the group  
11 consisting of currency, goods or services, discounts on goods or services, redeemable  
12 program points and prizes.

13 19. The method of claim 17, wherein said information and/or content is selected from the  
14 group consisting of ezines, newsletters, and marketing messages.

15

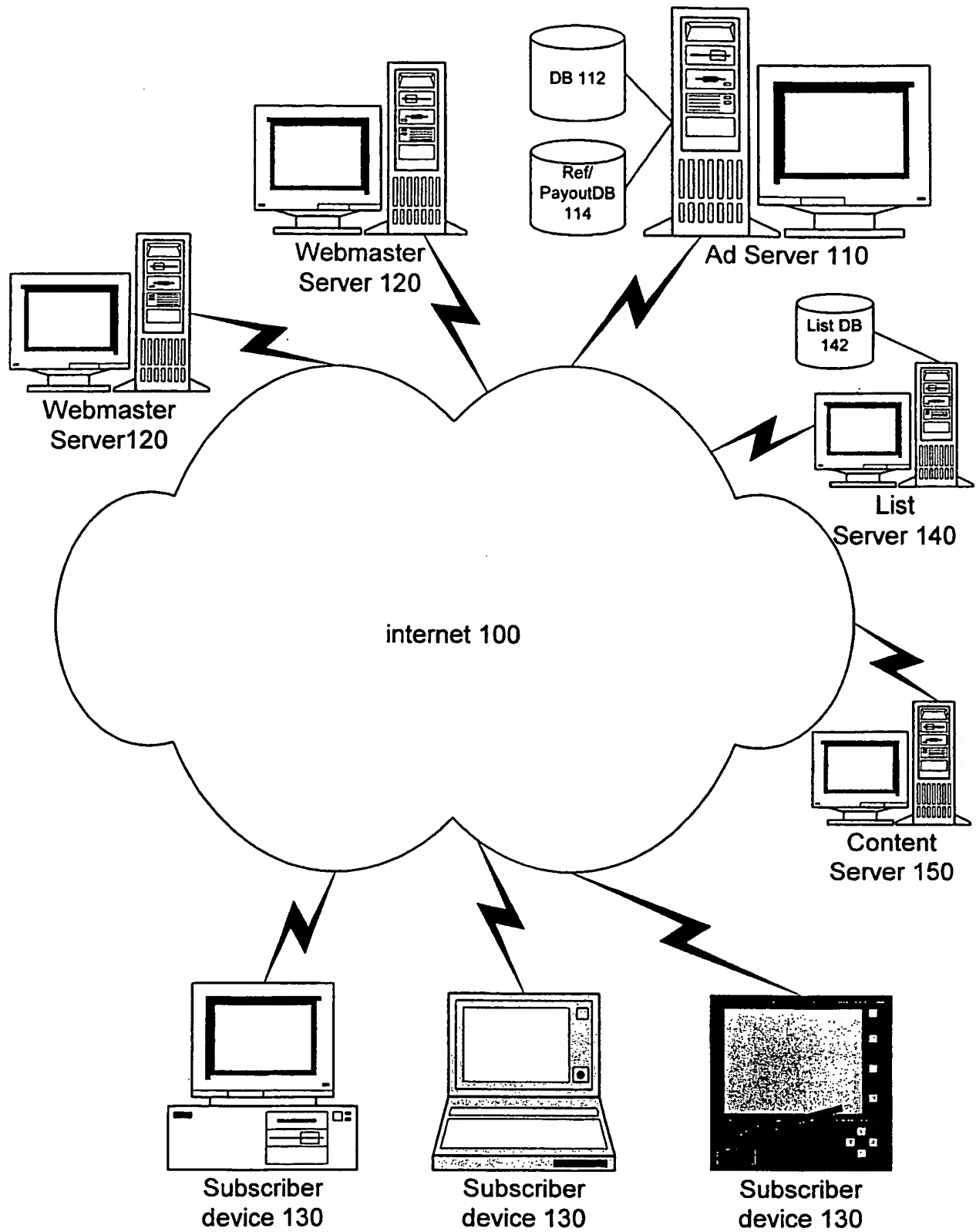


FIG. 1

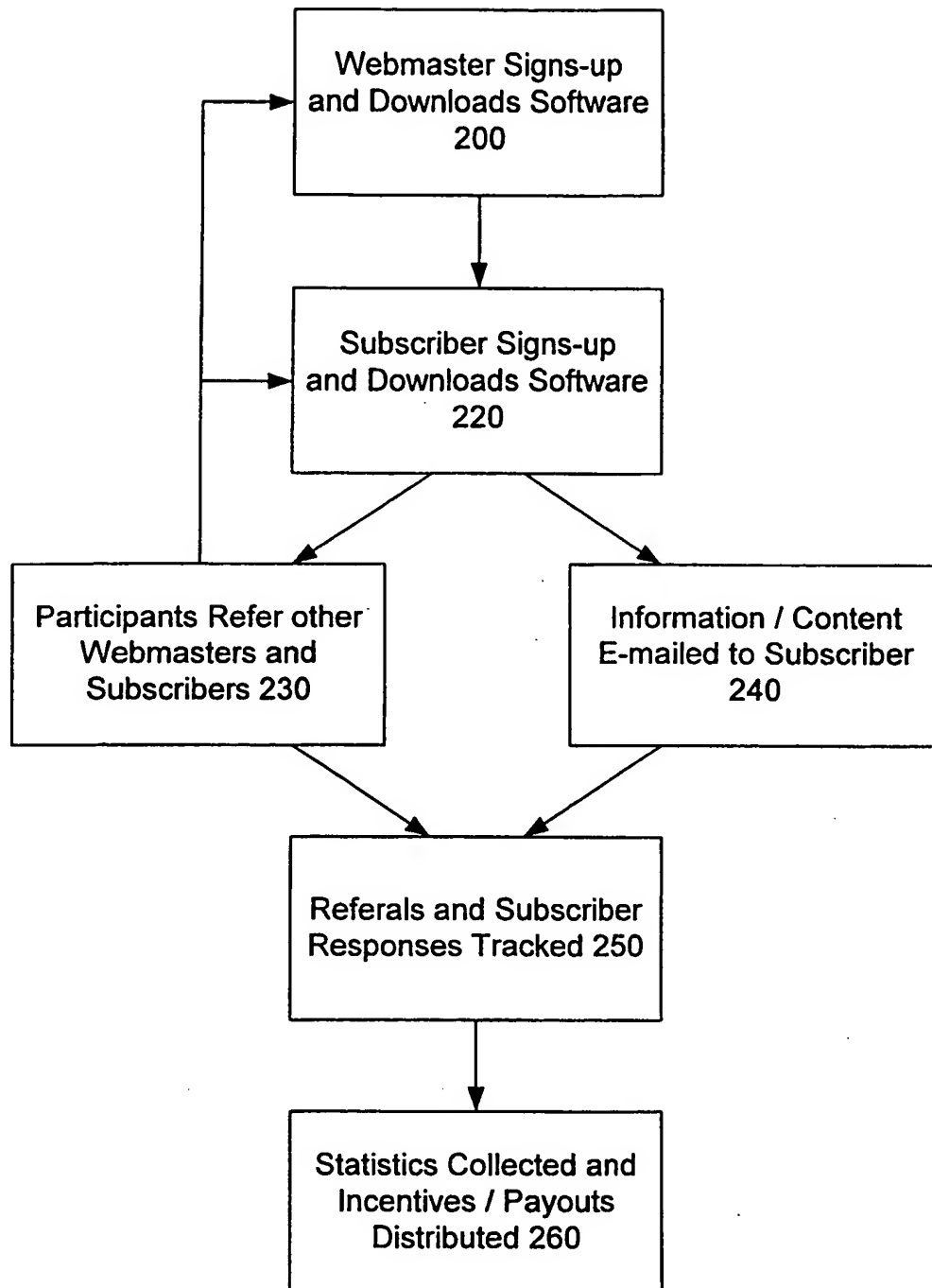


FIG. 2

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